

# History of the Highlands

## Highland Park

The land where the Highland Park neighborhood is today was once owned by Albert Steves Sr. who allowed it to be used for grazing by local dairy farms. The land was purchased by the developers L.P. Beck, Benno Kayton, W.C. Rigsby, Ben Hammond, Charles Peterson and A.M. Avant in 1909.

The neighborhood was established in 1910 making it one of the older neighborhoods in San Antonio. It got its start when

developers extended street-car lines to the property and sold lots to upper-middle class future homeowners. Once the home of several prominent local residents, the area boasted one of the highest elevations on the southeast side. The inherent cool breezes and bucolic setting were attractive selling points.

Through the years, the bungalow style architecture gave way to a patch-work of styles including Spanish and English Tudor. The neighborhood grew to its approximate current density between WWI and WWII. Its integrity was almost decimated by efforts in the 1950's to construct

IH-10 through its heart. Fortunately, neighborhood leaders were able to thwart these plans and preserve the character of the community.

The Highland Park area was originally an extension of the King William historic area, later separated into three parts by the development of interstate highways. As separate communities, the neighborhoods all began to experience problems of urban blight.

The neighborhood fell into decline in the mid 1970s when many 2-story homes were converted to apartments and housing





stock fell into disrepair. The local park for which the neighborhood was named had become a dangerous home to truants and vagrants and the community as a whole needed rejuvenation.

The 1980s saw a renaissance period with establishment of an active neighborhood association. The group implemented home improvement activities and promoted community cohesion through improvement efforts. This resulted in an influx of younger residents to the area who began to plan for the future.

## Highland Hills

The area that is now Highland Hills was once frequented by local hunters, but was targeted for development in late 1940s by local developer E.J. Burke. The idea was to accommodate the influx of soldiers returning to San Antonio from World War II. The GI bill had been passed and people were in the market for new housing.

The majority of the homes in Highland Hills were built from 1940 to 1959 and commercial development accompanied the growth. McCreless Village, a small shopping center development spearheaded by real-estate developer G.S. McCreless was constructed in 1952 with plans for expansion. Over the course of the next decade these plans culminated in the completion of McCreless Shopping City, now known as McCreless Mall.

The shopping center was viewed as a tremendous accomplishment in its day and was heralded by architect Phil Shoop as the largest shopping center in Texas at that time. Upon opening, it became a popular establishment and even hosted the 1965 Miss America Pageant for its 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary celebration.

In 1968 the Highlands area also hosted the 50th PGA championship. Pecan Valley Golf Club was the site for the prestigious tournament and is listed as one

of the top 50 courses in the nation even today.

However, the area began to stagnate after the prosperous 1950s and early 1960s due to northward flight. Development interest in the area waned considerably. The area fell into decline and experienced common difficulties such as increased crime, deteriorating housing stock and degraded community facilities and infrastructure throughout the 1970s.

In 1980, the Highland Hills Neighborhood Association was established. This marked the impetus of a movement to improve the neighborhood and local involvement increased under enthusiastic leadership. Improvement initiatives undertaken by the association include participation in the Cellular on Patrol Program and the establishment of Southeast Highland Hills Good Neighbor Crime Watch.